

## **Romans 17**

### **October 22, 2012**

Blessed be the LORD, Who daily bears our burden, the God Who is our salvation. PS 68:19

God has opened the gates of heaven to whosoever will, may come. The next verses talk about how He has provided escape from death, and with this how will he not give us all things that we need? When we give ourselves up to be His people we will be loaded with His benefits. Blessed be the Lord. for it is owing to the mediation of Christ that we live comfortably and are daily loaded with benefits. So many are the gifts of God's bounty that we may be truly said to be loaded with them according to the requirements of the day. I urge you to take the time each day to thank God for at least 5 things.

We have come to the end of our study of the book of Romans. By my account we have spent about 25 weeks going through this amazing letter written by Paul, the Pharisee, apostle, missionary and builder of the church. Remember Paul was Jewish, he was born in Tarsus, in Cilicia, far away from Jerusalem. Our first encounter with this man is where we see him giving his approval to the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58). Paul was a very religious man and zealous to protect the purity of his Jewish religion from the new sect called "the Way".

Paul was a Pharisee trained in the LAW; he was of the tribe of Benjamin and also was a Roman citizen. God uniquely prepared him for the ministry that he finally began. Being a Roman citizen he had special privileges such as a right to a fair trial and also the rights to travel throughout the Roman Empire. A person could become a Roman citizen by being born to parents who were citizens or by purchase.

Paul had dual citizenship-in Israel and in Rome as he was traveling under the authority of the high priest to punish believers in Jesus. On the road to Damascus, he had an encounter with the living LORD Jesus Christ Who gave him a new assignment. Jesus told PAUL he was having a difficult time going against God's will but now he was being sent to the Gentiles as a minister and a witness for Jesus for this purpose; to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Jesus, that is eternal life.

This is a good time for me to ask you; have your eyes been opened, have you turned from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God in order to receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life? This offer is open to anyone, look for yourself in Acts 26:18, Jesus offered this and there is no one excluded. You don't have to "clean up your own life", you can't by the way, before you come to Jesus. He specializes in heart and life cleaning. If you are willing to repent and turn to God you can experience new life today. You will also notice that Jesus said there are only 2 kingdoms for us to inhabit; either the kingdom of God or the kingdom of Satan. There is no in between, if you are not in God's kingdom then you are in Satan's kingdom. This is not my opinion; this is the statement of Jesus Christ. Again I refer you to Acts 26:18

Paul obeyed Jesus and immediately changed courses and missions and spent his entire remaining life serving as a missionary to Gentiles.

In about 57 AD Paul was in Corinth on his second missionary journey and established the church there according to Acts 18. There was a lot of opposition there from the Jewish leaders and also because Corinth was a very evil city. It was a seaport, a major trade center and known for its immorality and idolatry, think of Las Vegas. You can read the letters to the Corinthians to get an idea of the hostile climate to a pure and holy Christian life.

On his third missionary journey Paul spent 3 months in Corinth, encouraging the believers there and also writing the letter to the Romans.

We learned that Rome was the capitol of the empire and being a believer there was to be a persecuted minority. Roman was consumed with politics, economic concerns, and pagan religions. Rome was filled with gods, and the thinking was that all gods were real, so Jews and Christians were views as atheists because they insisted on one God. To be a Christian in America now is often to be a scorned and persecuted minority. How narrow minded we are to proclaim Jesus as the Way the Truth and the Life and yet if you have accepted this truth you know the living Water flowing down from the Father, into your life for cleansing and refreshment is like nothing else in the world.

At first Christianity was tolerated in Rome as a sect of Judaism but from AD 54 to AD 68, Nero authorized the hunting down and killing of Christians. During this time people had to choose between worshipping Nero or Jesus and if Jesus was their choice they would lose their life.

History says that Nero murdered both Peter and Paul. With this culture of paganism and persecutions, Rome was seen as the epitome of evil and in Revelation John was given a vision of the fall of Rome-a symbol of evil in the world.

The church in Rome was not founded by Paul but had been in existence for around 30 years by the time Paul wrote this letter. Remember in Chapter one Paul said, "your faith is proclaimed throughout the world", so we can conclude the church at Rome was substantial and influential and had many spiritually mature members.

Remember as we finished the study in chapter 15 Paul sent greetings to certain people and from their names we can conclude the majority of the church members were Gentiles, with a few Jewish names mentioned.

Why did Paul write this letter to the Romans? We can see several reasons from our study; he wanted to introduce himself and establish his credibility for his future visit with them. He wanted to help them stay unified; imagine the tensions between the various pagan religions and the former Jews who made up this church.

Most importantly however, recalling that these believers had only the Old Testament, Paul wanted to clearly and strongly reveal, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the message of the sovereignty of God and justification by faith.

This theological masterpiece, this book of Romans is the result.

Laying down the basics of the grace of God and salvation for whosoever would believe would provide some unity for this church. They needed to remember they were members of a new family, fellow citizens of heaven and subjects of the King, Jesus.

The message of Romans is sin, salvation, spiritual growth, sovereignty and service. In Romans 1 to 3 we read the good news and the bad news. The bad news first, Paul said the whole human race is condemned as sinners deserving God's wrath and punishment—"there is no one who does good, no not one" Romans 3:10" all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God", Romans 3:23. He told how the pagans were guilty but then surprised them by taking chapter 4 to describe Jewish guilt. The Gentiles were openly sinning and the Jews were focused on law keeping, avoiding sin, so were religious and self righteous, all are guilty. Romans 3:20 "by works of the LAW no flesh will be justified in His sight, for through the LAW comes the knowledge of sin but now apart from the LAW the righteousness of God has been revealed being witnessed by the LAW and the prophets even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all of those who believe, for there is no distinction."

Let me insert here a definition of sin; it is refusing to do God's will and failing to do all that God wants us to do. The constant cry of "I will do it my way", pretty much wraps up the definition of sin. You see, it is an attitude rather which results in an action. We can trace this back to the Garden of Eden and our first parents, they disobeyed God and that self-will became a genetic flaw all the way through the human race.

Are you thinking, "I am not so bad, I haven't killed anybody", but the terrible truth, according to God, is that everyone has sinned either by rebelling against God or ignoring His will. No matter how religious we are, outside of Christ, we stand condemned. We cannot live that perfect moral life; we cannot earn salvation or remove our sin by all our trying and resolutions. Only Christ can save us.

Salvation is the good news revealed in Romans 3:21-5:21. The Romans had a regular smorgasbord of gods and religious beliefs. They assumed that one religion is as good as another. Have you ever heard anyone say "as long as you believe in something" or how about this "all religious roads lead to the same destination".

What is your answer to this? My answer is, "there is no road". However, clearly, the only thing we all have in common is that we are all sinners.

Back to the good news; salvation is available from God. Forgiveness and eternal life come through faith, not by our good works, observing laws and traditions. It is not a reward for being good, Romans 3:22 "Righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe" and it is available to anyone who will accept it by faith".

Although we don't deserve it, God in his mercy and kindness reached out to love us and forgive us. He provided a way to be saved. Jesus death paid the penalty for my sin. Jesus is the Way, as He said. Your friends and relatives may answer this statement by accusing you of being narrow minded and intolerant. This "Way" is open to anyone who will come, there are no limits. Aren't you thankful that there is a Way and you can know it for certain, rather than hope you are piling up enough good works to offset you sin? If you are still of that mindset, how much good work will it take, who sets the standard, how will you know when you are finished,

what kind of god would leave you to figure all this out for yourself and give you no help or standard?

Spiritual Growth in chapters 6-8. Paul clearly explained we are all sinners and how we can be saved from the penalty of our sin. Now we have to consider the practical application, and that advice really is the remainder of the letter.

First things first, we must grow up; being saved is a first step. Newborn believers must mature in their faith. Those believers in Rome were facing much of what we face today so how could they and how can we avoid giving in to sinful desires? After all we are constantly encouraged to gratify our flesh all day every day. What happens to believers who slip back into sinful practices?

Paul has more good news for the Romans and for us, when we are saved, God's power frees us from the cycle of sin and death and we are set on the path of sanctification. Sanctification, is another word for holy. It sounds difficult doesn't it? Not many of us think of ourselves as holy I suspect but there is just the amazing thing, God calls us saints or holy. This word literally means "set apart" from sin and given the power to obey and become more like Christ. To explain how being saved changes our life, Paul used the common practice in Roman culture of slavery; before salvation we had been born into or sold into slavery to sin and Christ purchased us with His blood out of the slave market to sin and now we belong to Him.

Now it's up to us to break ourselves free from sin slave thinking and begin to serve Christ instead of ourselves. More good news; every believer receives the gift of the Holy Spirit living inside of him or her to enable us to say no to sin and yes to Christ. Before you are saved, you cannot say no to sin. After you are saved, you have a choice to make and God is living inside you to prompt the right choice, all you have to do is listen. Paul say we are in Christ, we are to put on Christ, and this means we are ask daily for filling of his Holy Spirit in order to live lives that please Him.

Here we are at the en of 2012, has anything changed as far as human nature goes? Is Paul's good news still relevant for us? Our human nature has not changed, we will continue to live for self and ignore God and His rules for living unless we make a daily decision to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus, that is die to the desires of our flesh, the desire of the eyes and the pride in riches, 1 John 2:16.

Will you accept the new freedom purchased for you at such a high price? That freedom from sin's control, the law's demands and fear of God's punishment and growth in our relationship with Christ? by trusting the Holy Spirit we can overcome sin and temptation. That is why we heard that great declaration in Romans 8:1-2 "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death". I was bought out of the slave market of sin and give the rights and privileges of a family member in the household of God.

We have discussed sin, salvation, and spiritual growth and now lets talk about sovereignty. What did it mean to the Romans to hear from Paul about God's sovereignty when they were subjects of the mighty power of Rome, which seemed to cover the earth and be invincible?

Would the Romans believers be wondering "if God is in control, if He is Sovereign, why are we being persecuted, why are our friends suffering, what is God's plan for His people?"

Here is Paul's answer; Romans 8:18-19 "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed". Also Romans 8:28 says; God is working all things for good for those who are called according to His purpose". And consider this Romans 8:38-39 "We are more than conquerors and can never be lost to His love".

In chapters 9 through 11 Paul explained how Gods plan has worked in the past, through the Jews, how His plan includes all who call on the name of the LORD, Jew and Gentile and how God is in control of the present and the future. In addition Paul made it clear that all the unconditional promises to the Jewish people will yet be fulfilled.

Christians seemed to be a powerless minority in Roman culture and in American culture as well. We are discriminated against and persecuted. Paul's message is for us; God is sovereign. We can take comfort in knowing Who God is and understanding His power. He has chosen us, we belong to Him. He is good; He has great plans for our future, far outreaching our puny ideas or any temporary suffering.

Service Romans 12 to 15:13

Paul has explained the gospel by describing the sinfulness and lost condition of man and the wonderful good news that salvation is available to all who trust Christ as Savior. Then he outlined the importance of maturing in faith, which begins with understanding our freedom from slavery to sin through the work of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. Then we learned about God's sovereignty reminding us that when our world seems to cave in there is still a plan being worked out and a there is hope and a future.

Service includes how believers should relate in society to government to neighbors, brothers and sisters in Christ, encouraging believers to use their spiritual gifts and helping weaker members.

Christians living in any community, in Rome or in Loudonville can focus and make a difference for Christ. Living a transformed life, returning good for evil, helping those in need, being good citizens, loving others as Christ would love them. At the same time Christians should be unified, avoid arguments, striving for peace and harmony strengthening each other and accepting each other.

Remember when the night Jesus was arrested He told His disciples that people would know that they were his followers by their love for each other. When we put on Christ and love, as He loved we will impact our world. The love of Christ is defines as something that works for the good of another, even sacrificially, but definitely humbly and graciously. How can this work out in your life today?

Paul concluded his letter to the Romans with personal greetings and encouragement to believers to use their spiritual gifts to help weaker members. Then lastly he reminded us that we are serving the one true and only wise God.